

Message Text

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HQ USSOUTHCOM SCJ2

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MONTEVIDEO 3438

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, UY

SUBJ: EARLY IMPRESSIONS OF MENDEZ GOVERNMENT - I

REF: MONTEVIDEO 3254 (DTG 022026Z SEP 76)

1. SUMMARY: APARECIO MENDEZ' PRESIDENCY HAD A POOR IMAGE EVEN BEFORE HE ASSUMED OFFICE ON SEPTEMBER 1. THE JULY ANNOUNCEMENT THAT HE WAS GOING TO BE GIVEN A FIVE YEAR TERM WHEN THE PUBLIC EXPECTED A SHORTER TRANSITION PRESIDENCY, PRODUCED AN ADVERSE REACTION. THEN, ON ASSUMING OFFICE, MENDEZ IMMEDIATELY ISSUED CONSTITUTIONAL DECREE NO. 4, DEPRIVING VIRTUALLY ALL PROMINENT POLITICIANS OF THE LAST DECADE OF THEIR POLITICAL RIGHTS. THIS, TOO, BROUGHT CONDEMNATION, INCLUDING ADVERSE EDITORIAL COMMENT. DECREE 4 ALSO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RESIGNATION OF MINECON VEGH AND POTENTIALLY DEVISIVE SPLITS AMONG OTHERS IN GOVERNMENT. THE GOU MOVED QUICKLY TO REASSURE THE PUBLIC THAT ECONOMIC POLICY WOULD NOT CHANGE - AND IT IS NOT EXPECTED TO OVER THE SHORT TERM. NEVERTHELESS, APART FROM LIP SERVICE TO THE EVENTUAL TRANSITION TOWARDS DEMOCRACY, THERE

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HAS BEEN LITTLE IN THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF THE MENDEZ

ADMINISTRATION TO OFFSET THE INITIAL PESSIMISM ACCOMPANYING HIS TAKING OFFICE FOR A FIVE YEAR PERIOD WHICH BEGAN WITH A DEPRIVATION OF POLITICAL RIGHTS. END SUMMARY.

2. THE ONSET OF APARECIO MENDEZ' PRESIDENCY WAS MARRED BY TWO UNPOPULAR FEATURES. FIRST, HE WAS NAMED FOR A PERIOD OF FIVE YEARS WHEN THE POPULACE WAS EXPECTING NO MORE THAN A THREE YEAR INTERIM PRESIDENCY TO BE FOLLOWED BY THE BEGINNINGS OF A RETURN TOWARDS DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT. (MONTEVIDEO 2906). SECOND, ONE OF HIS FIRST ACTS AS CHIEF EXECUTIVE WAS TO APPROVE CONSTITUTIONAL DECREE NO. 4, DEPRIVING A WIDE SPECTRUM OF URUGUAYANS OF THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING IN SOME CASES THE RIGHT TO VOTE, FOR A PERIOD OF FIFTEEN YEARS (MONTEVIDEO 3254). WHILE DECREE NO. 4 WAS LONG EXPECTED, ITS ISSUANCE ON HIS FIRST DAY IN OFFICE WAS NOT A GOOD BEGINNING FOR HIS ADMINISTRATION AND BROUGHT A NEGATIVE REACTION.

3. ANOTHER NEGATIVE FACTOR ACCOMPANYING MENDEZ' ASSUMPTION OF THE REINS OF GOVERNMENT WAS ALEJANDRO VEGH VILLEGAS' DEPARTURE FROM THE CABINET. THE ADMINISTRATION MOVED RAPIDLY TO OFFSET FEARS OF A CHANGE IN ECONOMIC POLICY WITH STATEMENTS BY THE PRESIDENT, VEGH, AND ARISMENDI, WHO REPLACED HIM AS MINISTER OF ECONOMY AND FINANCE. WE DO NOT ANTICIPATE ANY SUDDEN CHANGE IN ECONOMIC POLICY FOR SEVERAL REASONS. FIRST, PRESENT POLICIES HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL DURING THE LAST COUPLE OF YEARS AND THEY HAVE A MOMENTUM OF THEIR OWN. SECOND, A NUMBER OF SIGNIFICANT LOANS ARE COMING UP AND CONDITIONS IMPOSED BY THE INTERNATIONAL LENDING AGENCIES WILL DEMAND CONTINUATION OF EXISTING POLICIES AND, PERHAPS, EVEN GREATER LIBERALIZATION. THIRD, VEGH COULD WELL PLAY A SIGNIFICANT AND CONTINUING ROLE IN THE COUNCIL OF STATE WHERE HE WAS JUST NAMED PRESIDENT OF THE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS. OVER THE LONGER TERM WE CANNOT BE AS SANGUINE WITH RESPECT TO ECONOMIC POLICY. ARISMENDI, THE NEW MINISTER, IS CAPABLE AND EXPERIENCED BUT HE LACKS THE PERSONAL PRESTIGE AND (A KEY FACTOR AMONG URUGUAYANS) THE INTERNATIONAL "SUPPORT" WHICH VEGH HAD AND WHICH ENABLED VEGH TO FIGHT THE ECONOMIC CONSERVATIVES AND PROTECTIONISTS

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INCLUDING THOSE IN THE SENIOR RANKS OF THE MILITARY. WE REPEAT, HOWEVER, THAT FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE ECONOMIC POLICY SHOULD NOT UNDERGO SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE.

4. OF MUCH MORE IMMEDIATE IMPACT WAS CONSTITUTIONAL DECREE NO. 4 WHICH DEPRIVED SO MANY URUGUAYANS, INCLUDING ALMOST ALL PROMINENT POLITICAL FIGURES OF THE LAST DECADE, OF THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN POLITICAL ACTIVITIES. THIS

DECREE WEAKENED THE MENDEZ ADMINISTRATION EVEN BEFORE THE PRESIDENT TOOK POWER. THE DECREE BROUGHT THE RESIGNATION OF VEGH AND PROTESTS FROM MINISTERS AZNAREZ AND BLANCO, AT LEAST. IT ALSO CAUSED HEATED DEBATE AND SHARP DIFFERENCES AMONG THE MILITARY AND AMONG MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF STATE, SOME OF WHOM RESIGNED AND SOME OF WHOM WERE FORCED OUT FOR HAVING OPPOSED IT. EVEN THOUGH A SUBSEQUENT SHOW OF UNANIMITY WAS PRODUCED IN THE VOTE FOR MENDEZ IN THE COUNCIL OF THE NATION, DEEP RIFTS OCCURED OVER POLICY TOWARD THE POLITICOS, AND THE EFFECTS WILL HAUNT THE PRESIDENT AND THE MILITARY FOR A LONG TIME TO COME. WE DO NOT HAVE AN ACCURATE READING OF OVERALL (NON-JUNTA DE GENERALES) MILITARY ATTITUDES TOWARDS DECREE NO. 4 BUT WE HAVE HEARD OF RUMBLINGS AMONG MIDDLE GRADE OFFICERS THAT THE WHOLE EPISODE, INCLUDING BORDABERR'S REMOVAL, WAS A "COMEDY" AND A FORMER ARMY CINC, NOW RETIRED, TOLD GENERAL RAIMUNDEZ IN THE PRESENCE OF A MISSION OFFICER THAT THEY (THE MEMBERS OF THE JUNTA) WERE COMMITTING MANY ERRORS AND THAT THEY HAD BETTER REMEMBER THAT THE PARTIES, NOT THE MILITARY, HAD THE EXPERIENCE AND CAPABILITY TO GOVERN.

5. POLITICAL FIGURES, PRESUMABLY REFLECTING POPULAR ATTITUDES,

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C O N F I D E N T I A L FINAL SECTION OF 2 MONTEVIDEO 3438

CONDEMN DECREE 4, IN PART BECAUSE IT DOES NOT DISTINGUISH BETWEEN GOOD AND BAD, TERRORISTS AND PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES, OR DEMOCRATS AND COMMUNISTS. THE EXCESSIVE 15 YEAR PERIOD WAS BAD ENOUGH IN THEIR MINDS BUT TO PAINT THE AVERAGE LEGISLATOR WITH THE SAME BRUSH AS THE MARXISTS OR THOSE PROSECUTED FOR SUBVERSION WAS UNFORGIVABLE AND STUPID IN THEIR VIEW. THE PARTIES THEMSELVES HAVE LITTLE ROOM FOR MANEUVER OR PROTESTS BUT THEY HAVE WITHDRAWN THEIR REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE ELECTORAL COURT, THUS LAYING A BASIS FOR A FUTURE CLAIM THAT ELECTIONS, REGISTRATIONS, ETC., CONDUCTED UNDER PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES, ARE UNCONSTITUTIONAL. WE HEAR THAT NO POLITICIAN OF ANY STATURE PLANS TO PRESENT HIS CASE TO THE "INTERPRETATIVE COMMISSION" (MONTEVIDEO 3254) WHICH HAS BEEN NAMED TO CONSIDER EXCLUDING INDIVIDUALS FROM THE LIST OF THOSE DEPRIVED OF THEIR RIGHTS. POLITICIANS WITH WHOM WE ARE IN CONTACT APPEAR DETERMINED TO REMAIN ALOOF FROM THE MENDEZ GOVERNMENT WHICH THEY FEEL WILL BECOME SO UNPOPULAR THAT HE CANNOT LAST AS PRESIDENT FOR MORE THAN A YEAR OR SO. CRITICISM OF DECREE NO. 4 WAS NOT LIMITED TO PRIVATE COMMENTS. THE PRO-GOVERNMENT EL PAIS, WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING THE NEED FOR ASPECTS OF THE DECREE CRITICIZED OTHER ASPECTS EDITORIALY. THE OPPOSITION EL DIA JOINED IN CRITICIZING ONE OF MENDEZ EARLIEST ANNOUNCEMENTS BY EXPRESSING EDITORIALY, GRAVE DOUBTS ABOUT THE TO-BE-CREATED MINISTRY OF JUSTICE.

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6. WHEN ASKED PRIVATELY ABOUT THE MOTIVES BEHIND DECREE NO. 4, AUTHORIZED DENY THAT THE MOTIVE WAS VENGEANCE AND STATE THAT THE POLITICIANS HAD BEEN DISCREDITED (THEY HAD) AND COULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO GOVERN AGAIN. ALTHOUGH THE DECREE DEPRIVED A SEGMENT OF SOCIETY OF RIGHTS WHICH CANNOT BE EXERCISED IN ANY EVENT, IT HELD OUT HOPE THAT THE REST OF SOCIETY WOULD AGAIN ENJOY THOSE RIGHTS IN THE FUTURE, STATING, "THAT IT IS THE FIRM INTENTION OF THE AUTHORITIES TO RESTORE...POLITICAL LIFE..." UNFORTUNATELY, THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT CHOOSE TO PUT IN THE SAME OR SIMULTANEOUS DECREE SOME POSITIVE INDICATOR AS TO WHEN A NEW GENERATION OF POLITICIANS WILL BE PERMITTED TO EMERGE AND FUNCTION. NEVERTHELESS, WE ASSUME, ALTHOUGH THE AUTHORITIES HAVE NOT ARTICULATED IT, THAT THEIR HOPE IS TO GET RID OF THE OLD PARTY LEADERSHIP BOTH TO PREVENT A PREMATURE (THE GOU VIEW) RESURGENCE OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY AND TO PREPARE THE WAY FOR A NEW GENERATION OF PARTY FIGURES.

7. IN ANY CASE, HERE, TOO, THE AUTHORITIES WERE AWARE OF THE IMPACT DECREE NO. 4 WOULD HAVE. DEMICHELI HAD REFUSED TO SIGN IT DURING HIS BRIEF PRESIDENCY AND PRESIDENT MENDEZ STATED ON HIS FIRST DAY IN OFFICE, "I SHALL SEE THE NEED TO TAKE MEASURES WHICH GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY IMPOSES UPON ME, HURTING MY CONSCIENCE, BUT EVEN THOUGH MY HAND TREMBLES WHILE SIGNING, CONVINCED, I SHALL NOT SHIRK MY DUTY. I WOULD HOPE THAT THE BITTER TASTE OF THE...RESOLUTIONS I MUST ADOPT, MIGHT BE COMPENSATED SOMEDAY BY THE PLEASURE OF CREATING USEFUL ACTS (ACTOS) FOR THE

COMMUNITY AND SATISFYING LEGITIMATE PRIVATE INTERESTS." ALSO
ANTICIPATING (PERHAPS FEELING) THE BITTER AFTER-TAST OF DECREE 4,
OTHER SENIOR OFFICIALS REFERRED TO THE EVENTUAL TRANSITION
TOWARDS A RENEWAL OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS. ONE OF THEM, ARMY
CINC VADORA, ADDED A THOUGHT REMINISCENT OF WHAT MENDEZ HAD SAID
IN HIS INAUGURAL CONCERNING EASING UP ON SECURITY MEASURES. VADORA
SAID, "THE ARMED FORCES HAVE FINISHED A STAGE OF SECURITY FOR
DEVELOPMENT AND WE THINK THE NEXT STAGE MUST BE -- AND DO NOT
TAKE THIS AS A PLAY ON WORDS -- A STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT IN SECURITY
THAT IS TO SAY, NO LONGER GIVING PRIORITY TO STRENGTH WHICH IS
SECURITY BUT TO DEVELOPMENT SO THAT THE NATION WILL PROGRESS AS WE
WANT IT TO." HOWEVER, APART FROM LIP SERVICE TO THE EVENTUAL END
OF THE TRANSITION PERIOD AND A MOVE TOWARDS DEMOCRACY, THERE HAS
BEEN LITTLE IN THE FIRST TWO WEEKS OF APARICIO MENDEZ' GOVERNMENT TO
OFFSET THE INITIAL PESSIMISM ACCOMPANYING HIS TAKING OFFICE FOR
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A FIVE YEAR PERIOD WHICH BEGAN WITH A DEPRIVATION OF POLITICAL
RIGHTS.
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